SCOTSMEN AND NORSEMEN:

CULTURAL RELATIONS IN THE NORTH SEA AREA

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During the spring in one of the years of German occupation in Norway a small popular edition of the ancient saga of Sverre the king, who reigned some 750 years ago—he died in A.D. 1202—achieved an unexpected popularity, much to the amazement of the publisher. The reason was that the king, in a speech made in Bergen in 1186, had expressed the general feelings of his countrymen in a way that was felt to apply just as well to the situation of 1943. He said: "We should thank the English who come to this country bringing with them honey, wheat, cloth, butter, linen and other goods. The Germans have come in great numbers and in many ships"—they certainly did in 1939—"to carry away our butter and our fish, so that our land loses thereby. They bring only wine with them, and we are not grateful to the Germans for their presence among us."

In some ways the words of this king, a contemporary of William the Lion and of Richard Cœur de Lion, may be taken as a fair expression of the general attitude of the Norwegians, looking with a kind of kinship and co-operation towards their neighbours on the far side of the North Sea. This feeling of being neighbours still persists. It can be heard in local speech, when cloudbanks far out are called "the boathouses of England", or when some captain of a drifter would describe his being driven far out to sea by saying that he heard "the church bells in England". It is an attitude based on geographical fact. The distance, for instance from Aberdeen to Bergen is less than from Aberdeen to London, and until the crosscountry railroad from Oslo to Bergen was opened some sixty years ago a journey to the capital from Bergen would take some sixty to seventy hours, while the transit from Bergen to Newcastle could be done in half the time.

The wide stretches of desolate hills and mountains stretching from north to south through central Norway have an important

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place in the history of the country, acting as a divide, a barrier, between eastern and western Norway, and causing a deeply rooted difference between east and west. This difference is certainly growing less distinct year by year, as intercourse over land and by air has proved more rapid and more easy than going by sea; but it is still obvious even to the most casual observer. The difference between the bare mountains, the long-winding fjords, the countless islands, bare, windswept and without trees, and the endless woods, the long valleys with a river in the middle, and farther down stretches that might be called open country, is immediately apparent to every traveller. In far-off days, when Sverre the king made his speech, the western coast with the city of Bergen was indisputably the chief part of the country, and the west, by its very position, stressed even more one essential Norwegian characteristic: in being the rocky western porch of the Scandinavian peninsula, Norway's face has always been turned towards the west.

Some wise historian once wrote: "The frontiers of nations are fixed on land but very movable at sea". In the old days this was true, while in our days the interests of our people have been concerned even with the open sea and with the Antarctic and Arctic wastes. Thus the demarcation of sea frontiers has grown into a serious issue. With the predominance of the western coast in earlier periods followed continuous and important intercourse with Great Britain, an intercourse of very long standing. Archæologists have found evidence of such contacts from prehistoric times, and from the advent of the Vikings, etc. the general development is known from sources from both sides of the sea, from the Norse sagas, from Scottish and English chronicles and annals, and from Irish writings. But it does not seem necessary to recapitulate what is known about the actual happenings, as such a summary could hardly be more than a re-shuffling of the cards. The literature on the subject is very extensive, and the interpretation of the few facts known has varied in the highest degree.

On the western coasts of the North Sea the Norsemen came in contact with two peoples and with two very different types of life and culture. They met in eastern Scotland and in England people not too far removed from their own kin; the language would of course differ, but not so much that some understanding could not be easily established. Going farther west they met the Gaels, the Celts of western Scotland and the Isles and of Ireland, presenting a unity with a common

tradition for established centuries and sheltered by having a tongue of its own, unintelligible to the invaders. To these people the Norsemen were real strangers, and the impression of the invaders would therefore be more vivid, a fact reflected in Irish tradition. In Great Britain the annals record the raids and complain of damage done, and the advent of the first Viking ships is referred to in an oft quoted passage, one of the extant manuscripts adding that, on being asked, those on board answered that they came from "Heretaland", which is generally assumed to mean the present Hordaland, the districts around the Hardanger fjord.

They were coming from the north and the ideas about these regions held by the Scots, by Irishmen and by Scandinavians were probably rather hazy, but in the main the same. The generally accepted impression (that the sea-going Norsemen descended upon a peaceful settled agricultural population, living in the main in isolation) is hardly true. Seafarers from the west had explored the northern waters at a much earlier date. About the year 825 Dicullus, the Irishman, was able to give reliable information about Iceland from the evidence of eye-witnesses, correcting some errors generally held concerning constant darkness and impenetrable ice. His reference to the settlement of monks from the west in Iceland is confirmed by a statement in the Landnáma-book, the account of the settlement of the Norsemen in Iceland—even those pagan "Northmanni", mentioned by the Irishman.

From a northern point of view the aspect of the Viking expeditions differed. In Norway this period belonged to a time of expansion based upon the domination of the contemporary sea-routes. Norway especially was then, as it is still, orientated with its face towards the western sea. So it was with the Vikings a thousand years ago, as it is to-day when shipping, seafaring-men and investments, and the interests of the larger per cent of the Norwegians, are concerned with the sea. The Viking period was therefore not regarded as one of many phases but as a formative period of our history, and a touch of enterprise and daring on a more than ordinary scale gave it a certain glamour and made it a popular theme, both in general conception and in serious study.

In Norway the trend of these studies was given by the writings of the linguist Sophus Bugge and his son Alexander Bugge. According to their books the Norwegians, isolated and conservative, an old peasant society, had in the west, Great

Britain and Ireland, had their first contact with European civilisation: and from this world they carried back to their home-country a wealth of ideas, if not the very idea of composing and writing. So in ancient Norse literature, sagas and Eddic poems, as in the poems of the scalds, traces of western motifs and conceptions could be found. Those studies have been carried on, and new evidence added, and again the wrong use of the term Celtic has caused mischief. When hunting for parallels every Celtic source seemed equally important, and every coincidence equally valuable, whether it was taken from an Irish manuscript dated before the year 1000, or from a Welsh romance of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, or even from a Scotch or Breton folk-tale recorded sometimes between 1850 and 1900. To be accurate, there were other scholars who looked upon many of these alleged parallels with critical eyes. So did the main authority upon Norse and Icelandic literature, the Icelander Finnur Jónsson, and his writings with those of others were always a salutary counterbalance to the many equations suggested, as to the more general conception of the whole complex.

The main lines of the history of the Viking period are fairly well known and derive from many sources, but they do not give much definite information on special points, such as the way of life in the hybrid districts, or the means and ways of intercourse. The chronicles leave us with an impression of incessant warfare, of raids, names emerging and being dropped, a kind of puzzle that historians have tried to fit into a coherent whole.

In the west, relics or reflections of such intercourse as there was between the British Isles and Norway are all too few. Most of them are Irish rather than Scottish. Perhaps we may be allowed to let the Irish references stand for Gaeldom. Of considerable significance, for instance, is the Irish history of "The Wars between the Gael and the Gall", i.e. the foreigners, known from a single ancient manuscript written in 1170 and not complete, and from several later transcripts. The author's style and manner were modelled upon the traditional literary pattern, and he had his own point of view; and even if written probably only some fifty years after the final battle at Clontarf on 22nd April 1014, the account does in no way give a clear impression of what really happened. Some passages show that he must have had eye-witnesses among his sources, as when he quotes a Norse phrase in such a way that it is still intelligible,

or when he refers to the low-water on that day in Dublin bay, fatal to the ships of the strangers—a fact which has been verified by calculations. The battle was the virtual end of the Viking kingdom of Dublin and the emergence of an Irish centre of power, but the opponents were not two nationalities, and the background, with the numerous factions involved, was extremely complicated.

Reports of the battle must have spread wide and far, as in the Nials saga we are told that portents marked the day in Iceland, and in Scotland Darrad the Caithness-man saw the awful sprits of war entering a tower to play at their loom and to sing the chant that Darrad was able to learn by heart. The exact relationship between the Irish and the Norse account is hard to work out. Both however have in common the unrealistic "mythical" twilight, obscuring the events with its imaginative traditional colouring.

There are, however, other contemporary accounts which leave us with a far clearer idea of life in those days, such as the narrative of one Findán, who, more than a century before the Clontarf battle, was captured by the Vikings, was sold by one party to another, carried off in a ship, but escaped somewhere in the Orkney islands. Equally vivid is the impression given by a quatrain jotted down by a friar in the margin of the copy he was making some time about the year 900, giving expression to his feeling of gratitude on seeing that on this night a storm prevented any Viking attack.

Evidence of this kind is, however, rare, and to Irish historians the Viking invasions were only parts of a traditional pattern, a passing tempest like many before; and in the history or the nature of these foreign invaders they had small interest. They knew that they were not quite barbarians, and the writer of the history of the wars, mentioned above, may even refer to the "historians" of the foreigners to check his own statement. But in their history he had no interest as it is expressly stated in some annals from the year 872.

In this way Irish history does not yield very much information on other aspects of contact with the Norsemen than war and fighting. If one passes to Norse sources there is even less to be found. Reference has been made to the note about the monks from the west that had settled in Iceland, as to the saga-chapters concerned with the battle of Clontarf. To these references may be added a quatrain by the warrior king Magnus Barelegs voicing his fondness for Ireland and his

reluctance to return home; and, further, a passage in a later saga of a bishop, describing the activities of a would-be interpreter at the Irish court, illustrating the difficulties involved in such an encounter, and the curious fidelity of tradition, the Irish words having been preserved but at least one phrase having been completely misunderstood. The chapters in the Laxdöla saga, describing the journey of the chieftain to Ireland to meet the relatives of his mother, an Irish princess—she had taught him her own tongue—are more concerned with the heightening of interest by constantly deferring the final meeting of the relatives, than with giving any information about Ireland and the Irish. Finally there is the strange case of a sailor reading an effective spell "in Irish" when in peril at sea.

Magnus Barelegs, the young king with ambitious plans, who fell in a fight in Northern Ireland, seems to illustrate very well the distinction between those who settled in the west and those who returned. No census was of course taken, but the question is further connected with another one: what was the reason for this sudden expansion, for these expeditions to the lands on the far side of the North Sea? Traditionally they are conceived as the result of daring and of the spirit of adventure, and such motives were of course in many a case the reason for going: but the traditional young Viking, tired of his narrow surroundings, and wanting to see a larger world, such as our national poets used to describe him, is hardly correct. The Viking expeditions were on a scale too large to be accounted for in this way. A parallel has been drawn between the Viking expansion and the great migrations of the Germanic tribes many centuries earlier, and the juxtaposition has a real foundation in fact, the fact that the main cause was of an *economic practical* nature. Norwegian archæologists have called the Vikings "Ancient Emigrants", thus by an apt designation stressing the very core of the problem. At home in Norway the possibilities for new generations must have grown more and more difficult. It was then, as now, a country of mountains and woods, cut up by mountain ranges and by fjords: and inland travel and intercourse must in ancient times have been exceedingly difficult. What arable land there was could not support an ever increasing population. Such characteristics depend upon the very nature of a country, and are still valid, even if in our days the very constitution of the society has changed, and the means of getting a livelihood have increased a hundredfold.

In the Viking period Norse society was composed of farmers, small chieftains, each in his own sphere, living at the family farmstead with their sons and daughters, and with serfs, native and captive, to do the work. An older system, known to have been followed even during the iron age, persisted. The sons, on marrying, lived at the family farm; the families grew, and the farmer himself was the ruler of this "larger family". Technical implements were unknown, apart from such things as spade and plough, and the breaking of new ground was a very difficult matter. It is easy to see that a society thus constituted would reach a stage when the opportunities to support ever-new members of the family were exhausted, and the new and younger generations had to seek some other outlet. They turned to the sea, being past masters of seacraft. Experiments have shown that their apparently primitive gear for steering and sailing worked excellently well, and a technique for following a definite course was evolved, and enabled them to get safely to any place they wanted, even across the open stretch of the North Sea. The traditional directions for sailing to Orkney and Shetland are known, and we are told that the passage from Norway to Shetland, with a fair wind, could be made in forty-eight hours, only slightly more than twice the time taken by a modern passenger steamer. An expansion of the same kind happened when during the later half of the eighteenth century thousands of Norwegian families left home to settle in America, the new wonderland of the west.

Probably a large, if not the largest, percentage of Vikings left as emigrants, not as raiders; and that leads to the fundamental distinction between settlers and pirates. The settlers found, first in Iceland and in the Faroes, new virgin soil with hardly any traces of earlier inhabitants, and natural conditions were not too different from western Norway to prevent them from resuming their old ways of living. Even in far-off inhospitable Greenland, and the mysterious "Wineland", somewhere on the coast of North America, they settled. We have in Greenland the ruins of their farms, still appearing as green patches on the hillside, where the sites of houses and cowsheds can be traced. We have their churches, in ruins of course: but in one the stone walls, heavy and solid, are still standing. The Greenland colony was doomed to extinction, when constant intercourse with Norway and the outer world was broken. In the isles to the north of Scotland the invaders

seem to have had the land to themselves, while farther west, in the Hebrides, they met the Gaels and had to come to some sort of arrangement with them. Still farther away, in Ireland, they founded their colonies, in intercourse as in conflict with the Irish; and as the Northerners were a minority they were gradually absorbed. In northern Scotland they also settled, but of their contacts with the Scotsmen in peace and conflict over the hills to the south very little is known.. When therefore, many centuries after those troubled times, we try to estimate in what way this period of common history has left any lasting traces, the only way seems to be to examine the traditional ancient way of life on both sides of the North Sea, in order to ascertain whether any elements exist that could only be explained by mutual influence.

Such studies cover a wide field and the co-operation of students of several types is needed, as each branch pre-supposes some special kind of knowledge and technique. Some problems have to be referred to the linguists, to those who know the languages and their historical development. They have to study the place-names, where the relationship between names of Norse and of Gaelic-Scots origin offers an indication of the extent of Norse settlements. Linguists are also required for a study of dialects and loan-words. Of Sudrey-norn no phrase is preserved, only a rich stock of loan-words, most of them related to the sea. The Norse dialect of Shetland is well known, thanks to the effort of Jakob Jakobsen the Dane. Of Orkney-norn less is known but still the studies of Dr. Marwick present sufficient material for a study of the dialect. Loan-words may in a way be said to offer better illustrations of the co-existence of the new arrivals and the indigenous population. In Norway material of this kind is hardly to be found, a fact equally significant. No place name of Scotch or Gaelic origin seems to be known, and the few Gaelic-Irish loan-words found in Norse-Icelandic speech, some twelve to fifteen in number, all denote implements for field and kitchen work, and seem to hint that those who brought them came as serfs, and whatever innovations they brought probably preserved the words.

Problems of this kind can only be solved by specialists, and the same may be said with regard to questions concerning the study of the setting of daily life, houses, implements, food and dress, etc., matters usually referred to the ethnologists. In Scotland as in Norway ancient traditional culture was deeply rooted, and materials for study are plentiful still. Such

studies may also gain further evidence from observations made in other districts settled by the Norse; and in thinly populated countries, such as Iceland, Greenland and Norway, ancient reliques have had a far better chance of being left intact than e.g. in a country like Denmark, where cultivation has claimed nearly all the available ground.

In districts in western Norway archæologists have recently uncovered the sites of farmsteads dating from Viking times or from periods earlier still. The type of house, and details such as, e.g. the construction of a roof, have been studied, and the existence of a type of house common to the districts round the North Sea, and farther west, has been recognised. Scottish archæologists have produced a similar wealth of material and scholars from the north have taken part in the study of these relations. The establishment in Scotland of a centre for such studies in the School of Scottish Studies, with competent scholars for field-work and with technical facilities, will prove to have a great importance for further development.

Recognising the need of specialists, it seems equally important to stress that all these branches at the same time are a living complex, a unity, where each element has its function in relation to the rest, and also that, for this reason, every specialist will have to recognise the necessity of co-operation.

Such awareness of an ultimate unity is perhaps especially strong among *folklorists*, i.e. those who, like the present writer, have been primarily engaged in the study of the expressions, in words and customs, of the inner life of traditional culture. The very term *folklore* seems, however, to have certain hazy associations, and accordingly needs, if no defence, at least some qualifications. To ask for a definition of the term would probably be of no use, and any one is left free to choose among the fifteen listed in the American Dictionary of Folklore.

It is certainly a convenient term, but it is also far more than the innocent, rather picturesque hobby of recording odds and ends from the vast storehouse of oral tradition. Every one may admit that extremely valuable information has been preserved in folklore books written by amateurs; but when one realises that those stories and songs, ballads and folk-tales, are no haphazard conglomeration of items, but the scattered, often incoherent remains of an ancient way of life, in some ways narrow-minded, always self-contained, no one will deny the importance of folklore studies. Even the sternest classical scholar does not hesitate to interpret his texts by references to parallels

from folk-belief, whether of what is called primitive races or of ancient rural Europe. Considering the peculiar character of folk-tradition such parallels ought to be handled with due caution, and one cannot, or ought not, to quote an isolated item as proof of a certain theory. Anything might be proved in this way, and in the immense mass of facts mustered in, e.g. Frazer's *Golden Bough* there is sufficient mana, tabu and Divine Kingship to explain any custom at all. The essential difference between folk-tradition and a written text must always be kept in mind. The former induces a kind of perspective of development and change, of the passing of time, while a written document is the representative of a definite period.

Students of folklore have accordingly always to face the passing of time, the many centuries through which this oral tradition has been evolved; and their conclusions have therefore to be drawn with certain reservations. Imagine for an instant that authentic, extensive collections of folklore existed from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; remember the immense distance to be faced; and the risk in using evidence from our own times will be immediately apparent. The only justification for doing so is the *inherent permanency* and *stability* of oral tradition. A prevalent characteristic of the life and conceptions of the unlettered classes is an extreme conservatism, unbroken as far back as one can see, but breaking down before the onset of modern urbanised civilisation. Such conservatism is perhaps best illustrated by the countless parallels established between folk-tradition and the belief and practices of "primitive" peoples. Occasionally an instance of such continuity may occur apart from these comparisons. In Norway, some twenty years ago, a runic inscription was discovered, dating perhaps from the seventh century A.D. Apart from its length it had several other features that were remarkable. It was obviously somehow connected with a burial, perhaps part of some ritual, and the runes were fairly legible: but the inner sense escaped us, as we did not possess the associations meant to be roused. On two points only the sense was clear, i.e. the reference to the non-use of iron in such rites, and to the danger of an exposure to the light of the sun. On these matters old-fashioned country people had a point of contact with those present at that distant burial.

Assuming such continuity it seems justified to examine present-day folklore to ascertain whether traces of constant contact exist from the distant centuries. The numerous parallels,

the amazing similarities apparent even on a cursory survey, may, however, more reasonably be explained as due to derivation from a common source, mediæval European folklore tradition.

It is first to be noted that these two traditional areas, the Scottish-Irish and the Norse-Scandinavian, have one important characteristic in common. Both are outposts, the one to the west, the other one to the north. Accordingly, within both, the currents of folklore matter reached the end of their migrations, circled in eddies, being developed and influenced from autochtonous sources, from contacts with races by now disappearing and forgotten. Within both areas the main stock of folklore is essentially of the migratory European type. There are the standard themes, the well-known incidents in ever-new combinations, coloured by the surroundings, and blended with elements apparently universal, expressing "the collective unconscious", to borrow an American term, more expressive perhaps than the "independent origin" of earlier controversies. An important point is also that in Celtic Scotland, as in Ireland, ancient oral tradition has been preserved to an extent unique at least in western Europe, and is accordingly still alive and accessible to students. In few other places only is there such an opportunity to study a mediæval type of society and point of view, where storytellers are not only guardians of toys half forgotten but still representatives of an art. Rarely elsewhere have they still a public not only of children wanting to be amused or quieted but of grown-up appreciative listeners, ready to face a long walk or a wet night to listen to an old tale. For folk-tradition is after all a social factor, by no means confined to isolated farms: its true medium is intercourse, neighbours meeting, strangers arriving bringing additions to what is known, cautiously adopted if found congenial.

The importance of collecting is at all events obvious: so is also our grateful acknowledgment of what has been done. To students of folklore few names are better known than that of Campbell of Islay, and I know few other collectors whose descriptions of places and people are as vivid and sympathetic, and few books are more fascinating than his *Tales of the West Highlands*. Further instalments from his manuscript volumes will be hailed with the same delight as was J. G. McKay's *More West Highland Tales*, Vol. 1. And we know that Campbell by no means exhausted the field. The ancient art of storytelling, almost ritual in manner and consciously artistic, is alive to the

present day; and new records of the ancient ballads, or of the Sgialachdan—long complicated stories—have been published during recent years. There are many points of contact between Gaelic folklore and Scandinavian, but it is obvious that the background of Gaelic folklore is to be found farther west, in Ireland. There may be stories and songs where Norway—Lochlan—figures; but any trace of historical facts—apart perhaps from a name—is not to be found. Lochlan is a distant land of monsters; nowhere has one the same feeling of a real world as, e.g. in the stanza from the ballad *Sir Patrick Spens* where "they hoisted their sails on Monday morn" and "hae landed in Norroway upon a Wednesday".

With the Scots and the Lowlands and eastern Scotland the Norsemen must have been on more familiar ground. They were more or less within the same greater traditional group. The sources for a knowledge of Lowland Scots tradition are, however, much less extensive. There is no such rich store of folk-tales recorded, but still enough to show that the folk-tales were known—I need only refer to Buchan's fine collection, now rare and not easily accessible. And as in Norway, folk-tradition was not coloured by the existence of an old literature, widely known and extant and circulated in manuscripts, as in Ireland and the Hebrides. Iceland may have had similar conditions, and the saga-manner has coloured the way the reciters rendered even the international folk-tales, but in Scandinavia storytellers had no such pattern. The tales were part of their own conditions, accepted and retold in the way their own artistic instincts determined. And my impression is that whatever tradition was alive in Lowland Scotland was of the same character, and therefore more akin to that of Scandinavia.

Such common characteristics become even more apparent when comparing Scotch with Norwegian, or one ought perhaps to say Scandinavian folk-tradition. Of their derivation from a common stock there can be no reasonable doubt. The difficulty, however, is that such things as ballads and folk-tales were to a large extent things of the past when the first attempts were made about a hundred years ago to record them. Even at that date they existed only as a kind of survival, growing increasingly more foreign to general ideas and ways of life. And since then this development has gone on, more and more swiftly for every decade. In using such terms as Scandinavian and Northern, it is well to keep in mind that they cover distinct

national groups, each with characteristics of their own, while at the same time, when seen against another different type of folk-tradition, as, e.g. the Gaelic one, they present a unity. In speaking of "groups of tradition" within Europe it is certainly true that no adequate map of such groups has been drawn up, but at the same time the marked lines of division are in several cases apparent. They do not follow political, nor even racial frontiers, but seem to be determined largely by ancient lines of communication, especially by routes across the sea. Such considerations justify the use of a term like North Sea tradition: there is a kind of sea-consciousness colouring groups of tales and of belief current along the coast of the North Sea and the Atlantic.

Some districts within this Scandinavian group stand apart, and that may be said of *Iceland.* As mentioned before, Icelandic tales and folk-songs have several points in common with Gaelic and Irish tradition. Iceland had for a long period an isolated existence, just as did the Gaeltachd. Literature and folk-tale had not parted company, and the genuine interest in story-telling was the same. The carriers of tradition had an unbroken consciousness of a literary style, and Irish and Gaelic, like Icelandic storytellers, retold the European folk-tales in their characteristic way.

This, however, is by no means identical with the aim of every good storyteller: "to tell a good story in straight words", to quote an old Norwegian peasant. Such an ideal is inherent in good storytelling anywhere, but when literature proper, composed by and expressing the ideas of individuals, followed international patterns, the folk-tale was left in the hands of the unlettered, and had its own development as a folk-art, rich and varied but with a choice of subjects and a point of view limited to a purely local horizon. In Norway there were no literary prototypes to imitate; the links with ancient saga-tradition were broken: only in the ballads, protected by rhyme and metre, ancient diction and motifs could survive.

The examination of the relationship between the folk-tradition of Scotland and Norway may suitably begin with the question "In which branch of folklore are parallels to be found?" It is not a question of mere formal arrangement, but in the various groups, ballads, folk-tales, legends, folk-belief, etc., the interplay of migratory international elements, and those more intimately connected with national characteristics, varies.

The *ballads* stand apart, as it is already well known that Scottish, English and Norwegian ballads belong to the same group and are closely connected. Evidence is plentiful and accessible to all in the copious notes to Child's edition.

To the west the British-Norse ballad group was bordered by Gaelic folk-song, entirely different in style as in content, with motifs taken from ancient Irish-Gaelic romance, the tales about Fionn and his son Oisin, who as Ossian gained European fame through the travesties of MacPherson. The question whether a ballad is originally Scottish or Norse is hard to answer, and in more cases than one the explanation is rather the existence of a common source. As to folk-music, the question of mutual influence could only be answered by an expert.

The relationship between Scottish and Norwegian folk-tales is still more difficult to assess. Of the essential unity there can be no doubt, and a reader of the representative collections, if unfamiliar with the international character of folk-tales, could hardly escape the conclusion that there had been a wholesale interchange. Hence the readiness of earlier editors to assume "Norse influence" or "borrowings form the Norse". In most cases, however, such close correspondence is due to derivation from a common source; but still cases exist where the peculiar development of a plot or some particular twist in the pattern point to direct interchange. Comparing Scottish and Norwegian folk-tales another difficulty is apparent: apart from tales told in Gaelic from the west, the material is very scanty. An Orkney tale—*The Mester Stoorworm*—is, in spite of the editor's alterations, a remnant of a Norse story, and Campbell of Islay recorded, in English, the tale of "The Unwelcome Guest", a rare tale now seldom told which has close parallels in Norwegian tradition.

One ought perhaps in such cases rather to talk of remnants than of evidence of interchange. They seem to be of the same kind as the ballads or ballad-fragments taken down in Shetland, e.g. the *Lay of Hildina*, and others; "visecks" that were sung as an accompaniment to dancing in ancient style and whose existence is testified by writers like Dr. Low and Hibbert.

Points of technique in the construction of the tale may also reveal a mutual influence, such as the use of the "geasa motif", i.e. an arbitrary demand, absolutely binding, an excellent device to prolong a story *ad infinitum*. The device is characteristic of Irish tales, and its recurrence in Iceland and occasionally in western Norway points to borrowings from the

west at some period or other. In recent times a book may be the intermediary; but with records taken down a century ago, in a community where few knew how to read, and any translations of folk-tales were unknown, the only possible explanation seems to be a direct interchange. Intercourse has been going on. Scotsmen have settled in Norway, and round the year 1300 Scots-Norse relations played an important part in Norwegian history, with the royal marriage, an event rich in dramatic episodes, and the source of a Norwegian ballad-cycle.

One would rather ask, *why* is there among Norwegians, as also probably among Scotsmen, such a mutual feeling of close relationship, to which, e.g. the Norwegian fishermen transplanted to the east of Scotland during the war have testified? The general outlook, the mentality, was probably somehow akin on both sides. This is, however, a far wider and more difficult thing to assess. The general characteristics of a people, in prose and poetry, in outlook and mentality, in the general rhythm of life, is the kind of subject, or problem, to which perhaps a poet could give an answer. An historian, and in the widest sense the term covers even folklorists, is bound to keep to a more easily circumscribed field, and yet to come to one essentially of the same kind: the tradition of the people, more simple, but still the experience, not of individuals, but of the people.

A definite answer to the question of the ultimate relationship between a Scottish and a Norwegian ballad or folk-tale will probably always have to be tentative, and the reason is that neither ballad nor folk-tale can be compared in the same way as written texts, even if we find them in a manuscript or in a book. Their really formative stage is in the mind of the individual storytellers or balladsingers, ever changing—even if the pattern is kept intact; and the passing into writing or print is a critical stage in their life, and the influence of the editor is decisive. As fiction, handled by individuals more or less artists, folk-tale and ballad is to a large extent independent of the local surroundings.

More intimately connected with a definite district and with a certain milieu is *folk-belief* as expressed in custom, and more tangibly in the vast masses of legends of every kind, which serve, not only as the expression of belief, but perhaps even more as its constant confirmation. The fundamental conceptions of folk-belief are never stated as a formulated system, but there is always a legend at hand that satisfactorily proves

some idea more or less vague. When therefore traces of mutual influence appear within this branch, one may with some reason conclude that in that case the contact between natives and invaders was intimate and profound. To illustrate this point one might try to examine some fundamental conception that coloured the legends and determined the actions of the rural population of earlier days. In my opinion among such ideas the belief in another kind of being, sharing this world with man, is of special importance. It was a constant background to human life, never wholly indifferent, always to be considered, as every wrong way of action invariably led to harm. Those "others" were close neighbours, never quite dependable: and to hit upon the true medium between them and ourselves was always a problem, and of every step taken, fortunate or not, some story could be told in evidence.

The reference is of course to *The Secret Commonwealth* of which the Rev. Robert Kirk of Aberfoyle has given one of the few authoritative descriptions. The main function of this secret world seems, however, to have escaped him. That is to explain every happening that needed an explanation, to solve problems that seemed insoluble, and to sanction such actions as were for the general well-being of the community. The present equivalent would be religion, and probably the belief in fairies has its ultimate source within the same sphere from which religion has sprung, the word religion being taken in its widest sense.

The name in general use—the *fairies*—has acquired certain associations that seem to remove them altogether from everyday life into the world of free fancy, together with other picturesque symbols and fancies that nobody ever took seriously. The reason is that English literature, the great classics that everybody knows, has fixed the idea of fairies and their doings as diminutive beings mostly engaged in playing pranks upon mortals. When years ago a book advertised "The Coming of the Fairies", on the evidence of some persons especially gifted, it was a disappointment to find that only these diminutive ballet-dancers were "coming". They are quite different from the fairies of tradition, a difference noted by Sir Walter Scott, who explained the literary kind as due to "the creative imagination of the sixteenth century".

Mentioning fairies in seriousness may raise a smile with some, as if one would take some light poetic fancy as evidence of actual fact. The name, however, will have to do, with the

further note that elsewhere, where the belief, if not perhaps still valid, is remembered, these beings are recognised as an important element or factor in the life of man. In such districts there is no hesitation as to what you mean, when, e.g. in the Gaeltachd you mention the *sithichean* or the *good people* or in Norway the *hidden people*, or *those under the ground*, or *dwellers of the mounds* or perhaps only *they* to avoid a certain risk in mentioning their real name.

When such beings are mentioned in all seriousness it is not because one wants to contend that they exist or existed some time in the past, but because the complex of ideas seems to be a most remarkable link with ages long since past, or with a way of thinking previous to and independent of Christian ideas, as of the wisdom of schools and school-teachers. Through their finds archæologists may attain to some knowledge of how early man fought, laboured and lived, but nowhere, as far as far as I can see, is such a strange relic preserved as the *fairy faith*, the belief in fairies, and, what is of more interest, the belief that it is difficult but vitally important to maintain well-balanced relations with them. Probably the real religion and the daily religious experiences and practices of Northern paganism were dominated by such belief. The traditional picture of ancient Scandinavian mythology, of the pantheon of the gods, was created, or rather arranged into a coherent system, by Snorri the historian, a couple of centuries after pagan religion had lost its sway. Snorri knew mediæval literature, and his account of the gods, and even more of the ultimate fate of man and of the world, seems to be a kind of theology, where elements of an earlier date were fitted into a coherent system with new and leading ideas borrowed from the new faith.

The sagas prefer to describe the life and death, the deeds and intrigues, of living men and women. In this dramatic world the interest is focussed upon the actions and passions of man, and the background is rarely filled in. Materials may be found for reconstructing the dwellings, but far less numerous are passages that throw any light upon the mental horizon of these people. When such glimpses occur, they leave an almost frightening impression of the conceptions dominating this strange peasant world, as, e.g. in the sagas of the Eyre-dwellers, and of Grettir the Strong. More specially it is the strange conception of the deceased as being still alive and active, and invariably evil, that lends its colour to saga-life. The

consequences were serious, sometimes almost practical in kind, as when one of the first settlers in Iceland chose the site of his new farm because there was a mountain conveniently near, into which he "chose to die". The statement is given in a way that shows that such foresight was perfectly intelligible to all.

In suggesting a connection between those "living dead" and the fairies, the intention was nowise to raise the vexed question of the origin of the fairies, but only to stress the fact that fairy-belief was no light fancy, nor were fairy stories a mere catalogue of wonders, but had far deeper roots in the mind of man. If then such belief may be assumed to be worth serious consideration as a deeply rooted and important element, still more or less faintly preserved, one might make an attempt to examine its various phases; and, keeping to the North Sea countries, a comparison may reveal ancient contacts and influence.

In these countries one may discern various phases of the general attitude towards these beings, in spite of the essential agreement. As for Scotland by far the greater mass of evidence comes from the west, from the Gaeltachd, as is immediately apparent from every collection of Scottish tales and legends. Gaelic fairy-lore is closely connected with Irish tradition, both in the attitude adopted towards the fairies and in the popularity of the same stories. In the main they seem to deserve the appellation *the good people*, even if occasionally stories are told of their bad behaviour. They live in a world richer and more colourful than ours, they have kings and castles, etc. Most believers will agree that in some way they are connected with the deceased.

The *sithichean* of the Scottish Highlands and Western Isles are of the same kin and have a similar temperament; but in many tales a new note of something sinister and malignant is apparent. As an instance one may refer to a well-known story, often recorded, of three young men passing a night in a lonely shieling. In the evening they had a visit from three young women, who turned out to be some kind of vampires, bleeding two of the men to death, while the third barely escaped to tell the tale. The same motif is very popular in Norway, but the development is quite different. The young man in the mountain hut gets a visit from a whole flock of fairies, who dance to his piping. He notices an exceptionally fine girl, and somehow, in jest, he happens to touch her with his knife, thus taking

her a captive. They marry, and the union proves very successful. The tale is current all over the country as in the other Scandinavian countries, and it is worth noticing that in some versions from western Norway the fairy girl is malignant and pursues the lad hotly.

In tradition this evil strain in the nature of the fairies is accounted for by stories about their descent. They are the angels that fell from Heaven, and lack the grace of God. In Norway the general account is that they are also the children of Eve, but she once hid them, as they had not been washed, when Our Lord came to her unexpectedly. Hidden they have remained ever since. In Scottish tales they are under a shadow of doubt, and they have no chance of salvation, a problem that did not only worry the fairies but also keenly gripped the imagination of man. In Scotland a representative of the fairies once put the question to an old man reading his Bible, and got a negative answer, upon which "he vanished with a piteous scream". In Norway the point is a warning against presuming to measure the extent of the mercy of God, and the young curate who declared that fairies had no chance of salvation was convinced of his error by the miracle of his dry stick bursting into flowers.

Even if such a "souring" of the disposition of the Scottish fairies is fairly evident and often noted, quite a number of stories are almost identical in Scottish and in Scandinavian tradition. These, however, are migratory tales and developed by constant retelling, and have passed the stage of fairy-belief pure and simple, assuming some of the characteristics of the folk-tale proper. The actual attitude of the believers is accordingly more in evidence in stories about their origin and ultimate fate, as also in accounts of personal experiences, even if also such relations seem to have a tendency to stiffen into traditional shape, where, however, the emotional aspect may still be felt. As an instance one may refer to the conception of fairies moving in hosts, like a storm, the *Sluagh Sihde* of the Gaeltachd, dangerous to human beings. In the Hebrides this host is well known, and people who saw it pass have often noticed acquaintances, deceased persons, among them. In western Norway the host is equally well known, and is regarded by all as something evil, consisting of evil-doers, while farther east, in the long valleys leading down to eastern Norway, the conceptions as to those moving about have been coloured by imagination.

This complex has been often studied and explained in various ways. Some have imagined them to be personifications of storm and wind; some have said they were the degraded pagan gods, outlawed and damned; some have even maintained that they are a kind of sublimation of ancient ritual processions. In tradition the belief is that the host are those spirits that found no rest in the grave, moving about by night. Noting that this belief is held especially in the western parts of Norway, being unknown farther east and in the other Scandinavian countries, the inference seems justified that the conception came to Norway from the west, or vice versa—which way is hard to decide. The tales have also a wider background in continental stories about the wild hunt, of which an eye-witness account exists as far back as the tenth century. This belief, that some of the dead will not stay quiet, is perhaps universal; but the equation between such ghosts and the fairies, common to Scotland and Norway, may have its ultimate explanation in the far nearer relationship between ghosts and fairies than between fairies and man.

Briefly surveying the evidence of Scottish fairy-faith, one may note some Orkney stories related by Dr. Marwick. In one island, Stronsay, trows—the common appellation—are known by individual names; and within the memory of living men, people used at night to *buil the trows*, making a noise to scare them into their *buile*, or quarters, a green mound near the house. In Shetland stories about the trows are far more numerous, while compounded words show that the original form of the word was *troll* (*trödl*, Foula), that is, the usual Norwegian appellation. In Norway, however, troll is another kind of being, long since passed out of folk-belief, and remembered only when some special landmark, a stone, remains as a sign of their activities. Such giants are remembered also in Shetland by some individual name, as, e.g. in Unst: so are their wives the *gaikerls*, an exact counterpart of the same beings known in Norway. The trolls and gaikerls are the descendants of the *jotnar* of ancient Norse belief, and a *yetna-stone* in Scotland has preserved a memory of the name, and, like stones of this kind, it turns about on hearing the church bells. In Shetland the trows, or fairies, have other names, such as Hill-tings, Hill-folk; and the use of such appellations may be due to a vague knowledge that *trows* were not originally those diminutive neighbours, often seen and heard.

On the mainland of Scotland fairy-belief had weakened

at an early date, and information is correspondingly scarce. In folk-tradition their disappearance is explained by their departure, and the last fairy in Caithness is said to have been seen on the shore ready to depart for Russia. On the other hand fairies are said to have been "terribly troublesome" in Buchan about 1880, according to Dougal Graham.

In the countries on the other side of the North Sea the belief in fairies presents various stages of development, even if a common origin is evident, a background, of which an idea may be got through the stray reference to such matters in the sagas. Icelandic lore has preserved and developed ancient elements that have become obsolete, e.g. in Norway. The appellations show something of this. In Iceland the term *alfar* is still in use, in Norway it is only known in some compound words as, e.g. *Alvskot*, i.e. elfshot. Equally common is *huldumadur* or *-folk*, while a *troll* is a larger, wilder kind of being, but still active, and tales are told about encounters and meetings with trolls. They still belong to folk-belief, and are not relegated to fiction.

Names are perhaps no safe indication of the general attitude towards such non-human beings, but a change in ideas is indicated by the different associations they raise, and when the use of the term *trow* in Shetland involves a change in people's ideas about them, the appellation used has a certain significance. The belief in fairies, etc. is often interpreted in a romantic way, when the stress is laid upon the lonely hills and woods, where these beings lead a free careless life of their own. They are, it is said, personifications of human reactions towards the wild uninhabited surroundings. Their predilection for music and song made them exponents of the forces of nature. Such interpretation is eminently suited for poetic uses, but it cannot be held when confronted with genuine accounts of their doings, after all the only possible evidence. The general tenor of fairy-legends is by no means poetical: the predominant feeling is one of terror and risk, and the point constantly stressed is that misfortune will follow upon *not* observing the traditional rules for any intercourse with them, however slight.

The main argument against such romantic interpretation of the belief in fairies seems to be the fact that they do not by any means prefer to live in the wilds. One of their main characteristics is their wish to live as closely as possible to the habitations of man, with a strong, almost sinister desire to establish a relationship with human beings. They accordingly

enter, or did enter before, into everyday life, representing a dangerous element to be carefully reckoned with in all its aspects. Such intimate co-existence is especially vividly reflected in stories from Iceland and the Faroe Isles. Trolls and alfar pass in and out in ordinary life, even if there is the distinction that trolls, larger and more malignant, had to have roomier habitations in mountains and hills.

Any number of stories might be quoted in illustration, e.g. stories of mountains haunted by trolls, where the aid of a clergyman was called in to make it safe for fowlers, much as was an Icelandic bishop in an account from ancient days. The direct connection with ancient belief is strikingly evidenced in the collection made by Jón Árnason and others. With the alfar and the huldu-folk relations were more intimate as they were of the same size and looked like human beings. One may also note that they are considered objects of pity, envying mortals their life in the sunlit world and their Christian faith. One may compare the appellation *fornestkin*—i.e. pagan. They lack essential things, need human midwives, and steal the infants of man. They may live close to the people, often occupying an old building no longer in use. Stories of the same type are current in western Norway; and when given notice to quit, they move unwillingly away, punishing with the loss of an eye a too curious onlooker. Sometimes, especially at Christmas, they want the whole place to themselves, and a widely known story tells how they once were frightened and never returned. The belief in such Christmas visitors has been alive up to fairly recent times, and the ritual prescribed for such occasions was in Iceland rather elaborate.

Traditions seems tacitly to imply that these visitors were the *hidden ones*, but many features suggest that originally they were the deceased, earlier generations, returning. Why gradually the fairies have come to take their place is a problem of wide implications; and one reading is this, given with all possible reservations: as time passed the problem of relationship with those "living dead" in mounds or mountains became less acute, while the consciousness of their existence was too deeply ingrained in the minds of people who were still under the sway of tradition, and was accordingly not discarded. That did not happen until recently. But "the others" retired from the immediate vicinity of living men, to places on the fringe of daily life where human visitors only came occasionally, to the hills and to the shielings. Living in another world they became

the subject of legends, only occasionally of actual experience. Still, however, even if they lived at a safer distance, they had to be considered seriously. As the years passed they grew fainter, and were more and more rarely seen. They became creatures of free fancy, or, as folk-belief explained it, left for an unknown destination, or like the Caithness fairies for Russia.

The impression remains of how immensely complicated such a problem as fairy-belief is. And when an earlier stage, represented by Icelandic tales, seems to re-appear in the sterner features of Gaelic-Scots fairy-lore, the conclusion is not too far fetched that they are due to the influence of the Norse settlers. If this is so, it is evidence of a deeper and more intimate contact than that of which traces may be found in folk-tales and ballads.

"Cultural contacts" is an ambitious title, and in this paper they are considered only from one aspect, that of oral tradition. Being the writer's special field of research it seemed at the same time to be an aspect of the question where one might point to some definite observations. Cultural contact there has been from the first confrontation of Scotsmen and Norsemen, ever increasing during the subsequent centuries. Ships have crossed the North Sea; visitors have come and gone, settled and departed; on every occasion contact, or the possibility of contact, existed. The complex of mutual influence has become increasingly complex. The result is the Scotland and Norway of to-day, with the bewildering interplay of things they have in common and things that are different. To unravel every strain, to explain every single element in this process, would need an observer of wide knowledge and outstanding ability.